Claims:

1. A thixotropy-imparting agent comprising chain clay mineral particles, characterized in that said chain clay mineral particles have:

a thixotropic index (TI) defined by the following formula,

$$TI = \eta_6 / \eta_{60}$$

wherein η_6 is a viscosity (at 25°C) of a dispersion solution obtained by dispersing the chain clay mineral particles in a predetermined dispersion medium as measured at a rotational speed of 6 rpm, and η_{60} is a viscosity (at 25°C) of the above dispersion solution as measured at a rotational speed of 60 rpm,

of not smaller than 4.0 in a dispersion solution obtained by dispersing chain clay mineral particles at a concentration of 7% by weight in diethylhexyl phthalate (DOP) as a dispersing medium and not smaller than 3.0 in a dispersion solution obtained by dispersing chain clay mineral particles at a concentration of 3% by weight in water as a dispersion medium;

a bulk density of not larger than 0.125 g/ml; and

a particle size distribution of secondary particles as measured by a laser method, in which particle sizes of larger than 1.0 μm but not larger than 30 μm are not less than 70% by weight and particle sizes of not larger than 1.0 μm are in a range of 5 to 30% by weight.

2. A thixotropy-imparting agent according to claim 1, wherein said chain clay mineral particles have an average aspect ratio of 7.5 to 9.5.

3. A thixotropy-imparting agent according to

claim 1, wherein said chain clay mineral particles are such that a primary particle shape thereof has an average fiber length of 0.45 to 0.80 μm as measured by using an electron microscope.

4. A thixotropy-imparting agent according to claim 1, wherein said chain clay mineral is holmite clay mineral.

5. A thixotropy-imparting agent according to claim 4, wherein said holmite clay mineral is sepiolite or attapulgite.

6. A thixotropy-imparting agent according to claim 5, wherein said holmite clay mineral is sepiolite, and when the peak height stemming from the plane (110) of sepiolite is regarded to be 100%, the peaks stemming from dolomite and calcite have intensity ratios of peaks of not larger than 25% in an X-ray diffraction measurement;

7. A thixotropy-imparting agent according to claim 5, wherein said holmite clay mineral is attapulgite, and when the peak height stemming from the plane (110) of attapulgite is regarded to be 100%, the peak stemming from calcite has an intensity ratio of peak of not larger than 50%.

8. A coating material composition containing a thixotropy-imparting agent of claim 1.

9. An adhesive composition containing a thixotropy-imparting agent of claim 1.

10. A resin composition containing a thixotropy-imparting agent of claim 1.